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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2008

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In Today's Papers

AKP Reaches Out to Alevis

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report Prime Minister Erdogan said he would not remain indifferent to the demands of the Alevi community in Turkey. "We have not received any, but if we do, we will consider requests coming from the country's Alevis for their meeting and prayer houses (Cemevi) to be officially recognized as places of worship," said Erdogan. The PM noted such requests would be met under the existing laws.

On Friday, Erdogan, together with nine cabinet ministers and over 50 AKP lawmakers, participated in an Alevi fast-breaking dinner in Ankara. More than 270 Alevi organizations were invited, but only six of them joined the event. Radikal, Cumhuriyet and several mainstream papers say Alevis doubt the government's sincerity. The Alevis and opposition CHP believe the government aims at winning the Alevi votes before the forthcoming municipality elections next year, say papers.

Erdogan said during a visit to Berlin in 2003 that Alevism was not a religion, and that Cemevi were a place for cultural activities while the mosque was the only place of worship for Muslims. Alevis also remember that the head of the Diyanet, Professor Ali Bardakoglu, has always argued that recognition of Cemevis places of worship could harm national unity, say papers.

Barzani: "We're not Obligated to See the PKK as Terrorist"

Hurriyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and others report Massoud Barzani, the leader of Kurdish regional administration in northern Iraq, said they were not obliged to brand the PKK as a terrorist organization, and added that they were not supporting Turkish military operations into northern Iraq. "We're ready to help if Turkey adopts a

peaceful attitude towards the resolution of the problem. We will do our best if the US, Turkey, and the international balances contribute to the resolution of the PKK question," Barzani told a joint news conference with visiting Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Giovanni Vernetti in the city of Selahaddin. Italy accepts the PKK as a terror organization, Vernetti said, adding, however, that Turkish cross border military operations harm northern Iraq.

CHP to Prepare "Kurdish Report"

Mainstream Sabah and liberal Radikal report the main opposition CHP is to prepare a "Kurdish report" which will be based on two earlier CHP reports released between 1989-1995. CHP wants the report ready prior to a party convention in March at which a special commission will be set up to work on it. CHP board member Sinan Yerlikaya said it has become clear that military measures alone were not sufficient to resolve the Kurdish question. "The recognition of the Kurdish identity and the use of their language as well as legal guarantees for the development of the Kurdish culture are necessary steps," said Yerlikaya.

Iranian President Ahmedinejad to Come to Turkey

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that the Tehran administration, as a counter attack for growing international pressure against its nuclear program, is preparing a regional tour by President Ahmedinejad. Following the natural gas crisis with Iran, Ahmedinejad is expected in Turkey by the end of February. A request for the visit came from the Tehran Administration in December 2007, but because of President Gul's visit to the US Tehran was not given a date. Paper reports that Secretary Rice also is expected to come to Turkey mid-February.

Drug Usage Increased Among Turkish Students

Mainstream Hurriyet cites 'The European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction' report which claims that ten percent of all students in Turkey use illicit drugs. The same report claims that between 30-44 percent of students in Belgium, Ireland, France, Spain

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and Britain use drugs.

Editorial Commentary on President Bush's Middle East Tour

Sedat Sertoglu opined in mainstream Aksam (1/14): "President Bush made an amazing remark, expecting peace between Israel and Palestine by early 2009. Looking at his statement, one wonders whether he had no idea about the region or whether he was joking. A real peace in the Middle East calls for an agreement among Palestinians first. Giving the current circumstances, if Palestinian leader Abbas makes any efforts towards a Palestinian state, it will have to be limited to the West Bank area. There are 1.5 million people living in the Gaza area but it is under Hamas' control. How can we talk about a state of Palestine while Hamas groups in Gaza and Abbas groups in the West Bank continue to attack and kill each other? Moreover, Hamas has another goal which is to demolish Israel completely. Looking at all of these facts, there is absolutely no room for optimism in the year 2008."

Ceyda Karan wrote in intellectual-liberal Radikal (1/14): "During his final days in office as a lame duck, President George Bush spoke sweetly during his holy land tour. He said peace between Israeli and Palestine was possible and added that it was even possible to achieve this goal in 2008. He called on Israel to end the 1967 occupation. Furthermore, he remembered Palestinian refugees who had to leave their homes during the establishment of the Israeli state. However the US President, having committed himself to a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine, is acting as if he is not aware of these basic facts. The fact of the matter is that it was President Bush, himself, who practically gave support to Israel's expansionist policy with the new Jewish settlements. Those settlements not only violated the US' Middle East roadmap, but also became the most important obstacle to peace. President Bush also spoke as if peace could be achieved between Israel and the Palestinian Administration leader Mahmud Abbas who is only in control of the West Bank. While Hamas remains in the Gaza Strip, even Israelis personally say that there could be no peace with Abbas."

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- Over the weekend, Deputy Prime Minister Nazim Ekren paid visits to the mainly Kurdish provinces Batman and Sirnak to discuss steps for tackling economic problems in the region.
- The second hearing in the trial of the suspects for the slaying of three Christian Bible publishers in Malatya last year will be held Monday.
- On January 19, Ankara Chamber of Trade (ATO) will hold a meeting to discuss the ruling AKP government decision to move the Central Bank and the state-owned banks to Istanbul.
- The President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Rene van der Linden, will visit Ankara for talks with President Abdullah Gul, Parliament Speaker Koksak Toptan, and some AKP leaders.

International News

- President Abdullah Gul is to travel to Egypt from January 14-16 for talks with President Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian PM and FM as well as Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa in Cairo. Gul will also visit the port city of Alexandria.
- Prime Minister Erdogan will visit Madrid to participate in the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum on January 15-16. On Monday, Erdogan is scheduled to hold talks with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and King Juan Carlos.

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- White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said President Bush discussed the Strait of Hormuz incident with Vice Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, the commander of the Fifth Fleet, who stressed that his forces took it "deadly seriously."
- French President Sarkozy has kicked off a three-day trip to the Middle East on Sunday. Sarkozy is expected to sign a nuclear cooperation deal with the United Arab Emirates.

WILSON